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SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENCY REACTS TO GENEVA MEETING ON  
GEORGIA, EXPECTS EU TO DEFER DECISION ON TALKS WITH RUSSIA

Classified By: DCM Mark Pekala for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) French presidency adviser for Russia, Central Asia, and the Americas Damien Loras on October 16 provided DCM an update on French thinking about Russia and Georgia following the October 15 meeting in Geneva. He argued that France preferred to regard the Russian withdrawal from areas adjacent to the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as "positive" even as it questioned Russian intentions to reduce troop levels, as promised, to those of August 7. Loras predicted Russia would not withdraw per its full obligations under the accords agreed to in Moscow and Tbilisi, leaving the question of how to respond and whether to emphasize the need to continue the discussions opened October 15 in Geneva. He described Georgian President Saakashvili's remarks after the Geneva meeting as "not helpful," particularly what he called Saakashvili's "denunciation" of the Moscow and Tbilisi accords. Loras returned to this matter to contrast the relatively positive and constructive aspects of the Geneva talks with Saakashvili's "unhelpful" statements. While acknowledging Saakashvili's difficult domestic situation, Loras asked whether Saakashvili was capable of being a statesman instead of a local politician.

¶2. (C) Musing a bit about alternatives, Loras asserted that the GOF did not want to get into a "legalistic argument" with the parties or the U.S. The EU, he continued, cannot put its relations with Russia on hold indefinitely. Paris was inclined to "secure the situation on the ground" as a first priority and consolidate the talks that had started in Geneva. Loras lamented how the situation in Georgia, since conflict erupted, had changed from one that was in Georgia's favor to one that now favors Russia. DCM noted that the USG is advocating "strategic patience" by Georgia and using the talks begun in Geneva to pressure Moscow in the immediate term, for example, to allow more observers into the disputed territories. When Loras nodded and spoke of the need "to try to manage things," DCM added "while giving economic and other support to Georgia."

¶3. (C) In response to DCM's question about possible legal measures that could be taken against companies doing business in South Ossetia or Abkhazia without Georgian permission, Loras declared that Europe "cannot afford" sanctions or other legal measures. Gazprom, he observed, is present in Abkhazia and the EU would guard against any restrictions "backfiring" on it. France is not in as vulnerable a position as others in the EU, Loras explained, since it relies more on other sources for natural gas like Algeria. The problem, however, arises in seeking to arrive at a common EU position on economic measures. At that point, the vulnerability of other EU states arises. Loras cited Poland as an example of an EU state that might emotionally wish to take a hard line against Russia but can hardly afford to given its total dependence on Russia for natural gas supplies. Loras said the EU would also need to weigh the pros and cons of individual travel bans or economic measures targeting individuals. France, he

opined, preferred subtler methods, such as its recent insistence that a South Ossetian leader apply for a visa in Tbilisi (which he would not do) instead of Moscow. The hypersensitivity of South Ossetian and Abkhaz leaders was another factor that had to be taken into account, and Loras pointed to the near collapse of the talks in Geneva when representatives of the de facto regimes threatened to walk out over their credentialing. We need to take these sensitivities into account if we want the process to continue.

14. (C) In response to DCM's question about the EU position to be announced at the conclusion of the current European Council meeting, especially over negotiation of a partnership agreement, Loras responded that it was still under discussion in Brussels. He was nevertheless confident that, "at the end of the day," negotiations will resume. The question, then, was on the approach. Loras claimed that there was a growing awareness within the EU that progress on Georgia was probably not a good benchmark for deciding whether to move ahead on the partnership agreement. He predicted that the Council would not say that talks would resume but it would also not say that they should be stopped. Instead, it will probably call for a further review of the situation after the EU/Russia summit in Nice on November 14.

STAPLETON